

Times-Herald

Vallejo schools safeguard K-3 class-size cap amid deep cuts

By Shauntel Lowe

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The Vallejo school board early Thursday morning tentatively approved nearly \$5.7 million in budget cuts, but decided not to increase K-3 class sizes.

The unanimous vote came just after midnight, more than six hours after the board meeting began.

The board approved layoffs for maintenance and grounds workers and nearly halved the Vallejo Adult School budget, with the caveat that these cuts would be revisited.

Board members, however, voted against a staff recommendation to increase K-3 class sizes from 28 to 31, expressing concern that these early years were too important for students to have them in large classes.

Board members also voted against cutting \$40,000 from K-5 art and music support. District staff said the money helps pay consultants to teach drum classes and chorus at four elementary schools.

The \$5.68 million in approved cuts fall short of next year's projected deficit of \$6.175 million. Increasing K-3 classes could have saved an estimated \$800,000.

Board members said they would revisit the cuts in coming weeks and months and also instructed

district staff to pursue cuts that must be negotiated with employee unions, like a shorter school year.

As Wednesday's meeting dragged on, with employees pleading for their jobs and calling for deeper cuts at the district office, it began to look like a repeat of the stalled school closure decision was on its way.

Both the school closure and budget cut votes were preceded by multiple community forums, where board members requested more information from district officials before making their decision.

Yet, as occurred at the first school closure decision meeting in December, it was time to vote and many questions remained unanswered: What classes and staff comprise the \$1.5 million to be cut from adult education? What would the \$100,000 in transportation cuts look like? How would students be impacted by increasing class sizes?

District staff also were criticized for not making available the second interim budget report presented Wednesday night. Though the meeting agenda released last Friday said the report would be available on the district Web site, it was not posted until the Times-Herald asked for it Tuesday afternoon. A copy was available for viewing at the district office.

Also at the meeting:

* It was announced that Pennycook and Wardlaw elementary schools are under evaluation to be named California Distinguished Schools, an honor for those that have "demonstrated educational excellence for all students and progress in narrowing the achievement gap."

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* Superintendent Reynaldo Santa Cruz said district officials are still determining what to do about Vallejo and Hogan high schools' inclusion on a list of the state's lowest 5 percent of persistently low achieving schools.

Vallejo school cuts at a glance

Projected 2010-11 deficit: \$6.175 million

- * Reduce classified overtime (\$250,000)
- * Reduce maintenance, operations and clerical substitutes (\$300,000)
- * Reduce district library/textbook support (\$65,000)
- * Reduce transportation budget (\$100,000)
- * Maintenance and grounds layoffs (\$700,000)
- * Vallejo Educational Academy, Independent Study and Peoples High School layoffs (\$260,000)
- * District office layoffs (\$575,000)
- * Reduce programs in special education (\$560,000)
- * Energy conservation (\$180,000)
- * Reduce adult education (\$1.5 million)
- * Reduce summer school (\$287,000)
- * **Eliminate:**
- * Peer Assistance and Review Program (\$76,628)

* Beginning Teacher Support and Assistance Program (\$204,900)

* K-5 physical education program support (\$146,000)

* 1802 Counseling program (\$329,000)

* Community Based Educational Tutoring (\$71,000)

* Pupil Retention Program (\$80,614)

Total: \$5.685 million

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